



## Agricultural Marketing Service

# COOL

## Country of Origin Labeling

### Retailer Information

#### What is COOL?

Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) is a labeling law that requires retailers to provide information to consumers regarding the source of certain foods referred to as “covered commodities.”

#### Who has to follow COOL?

Retail establishments who are subject to the licensing requirements of the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act (PACA) are required to provide COOL information to consumers at the point of sale. Retailers who purchase an aggregate of \$230,000 of fruits and vegetables per year are subject to PACA licensing requirements.

#### Who is exempt from COOL?

Hotels, restaurants, bars, taverns, delicatessens, salad bars, farmers markets, or other similar institutions that provide ready-to-eat foods are EXEMPT from the COOL requirements.



#### Responsibility of Retailers

The declaration of country of origin, and the method of production for fish and shellfish, must be legible and placed in a conspicuous location, so as to render it likely to be read and understood by a customer under normal conditions of purchase. The declaration of country of origin may be typed, printed, or handwritten provided it is conspicuous, in conformance with other Federal labeling laws, and does not obscure other labeling information required by other Federal regulations.

#### COOL Labeling Options at the Point of Sale include:

- Placard
- Sticker
- Twist tie
- Sign
- Band
- Pin Tag

#### Recordkeeping Requirements

- Retailers must maintain records for 1 year that identifies the covered



commodity, country of origin, method of production (if applicable) and supplier information (name and address) from the immediate previous supplier.

- Records used in the normal course of business may be maintained in either hard copy or electronic format.
- Records may be maintained in any location.
- Upon request by a USDA representative, a retailer must provide records within 5 business days.

#### What are COOL Covered Commodities?

A covered commodity is one that must have COOL information at the point of sale. These include: fresh & frozen fruits and vegetables; wild & farm-raised fish and shellfish; muscle cut and ground chicken, lamb and goat meat; raw peanuts, pecans, and macadamia nuts; and ginseng.

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**What are excluded items?**

Processed foods are excluded from COOL requirements. Processed foods are items derived from a covered commodity:

1. That have undergone specific processing resulting in a change of character (e.g., cooking, curing, smoking, restructuring); or,
2. That have been combined with another covered commodity or substantive component.

**Examples of Processed Foods:**

- Teriyaki Flavored Chicken
- Roasted Peanuts
- Breaded Chicken Tenders
- Fish Sticks
- Hash Browns
- Canned Tuna
- Mixed Vegetables
- Arugula and Baby Spinach Mix
- Salad Kit
- Marinated Garlic Shrimp

## Labeling Requirements For Covered Commodities

### Muscle Cuts of Meat: Chicken, Lamb, & Goat

The Omnibus Spending Act of 2016 amended the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 by repealing mandatory COOL requirements for beef and pork muscle cuts, ground beef, and ground pork. Requirements did not change for chicken, lamb, and goat commodities.

- For U.S. origin muscle cut chicken, lamb, and goat items, the label may state, "Born/Hatched, Raised, Slaughtered/Harvested in the U.S."

- Meat derived from animals where production steps occurred in multiple countries including the U.S., must be labeled with production steps at the point of sale. The label may state, "Born in Country X, Raised and Harvested in the U.S." or "Born and Raised in Country X, Slaughtered in the U.S."

- Country of Origin declarations for imported meat are determined by U.S. Customs and Border Protection. All production steps occur outside of the U.S. and therefore are not required at the retail point of sale. The label may state, "Product of Country X."

### Ground Meat: Chicken, Lamb, & Goat

COOL requirements for ground meat products necessitates retailers to list all possible countries included or that may be reasonably included. If a raw material from a specific origin is in a processor's inventory within the past 60 days, that country is a possible country of origin and must be listed as an origin on the label.

### Perishable Agricultural Commodities: Fruits, Vegetables, Peanuts, Pecans, Macadamia Nuts, & Ginseng

- The country of origin declaration is where the product is harvested.
- State, regional, or distinct locality designations may be used as the country of origin declaration for perishable agricultural commodities.



### Fish & Shellfish

Fish and shellfish must include country of origin and method of production (farm-raised or wild-caught) at the point of sale.

- U.S. origin is derived from farm-raised fish and shellfish that are hatched, raised, harvested, and processed in the United States or from wild fish and shellfish harvested in waters of the United States or by a United States flagged vessel and processed in the United States and that have not undergone substantial transformation outside of the United States.
- Imported fish or shellfish that have undergone substantial transformation in the U.S. should be labeled as "From Country X, Processed in the U.S." or "Product of X, U.S."
- Imported fish or shellfish that has not undergone substantial transformation in the U.S. shall have the country of origin declared by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection.



### Retailer Compliance

The COOL division conducts surveillance reviews at thousands of retail establishments each year. During a COOL retail review, a USDA representative will ensure:

1. Covered commodities are labeled with a country of origin and method of production at the point of sale; and,
2. Country of origin and method of production declarations are accurate based on an assessment of the retailer's recordkeeping practices.

Consumers may report suspected COOL non-compliances to: [COOL@ams.usda.gov](mailto:COOL@ams.usda.gov)

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